DAR EL-MAKRIFAH: Journal of Islamic Religious Education
E-ISSN 3123-9935 P-ISSN 3123-9943
Vol. 02 No. 02 (2026) : 278-291
Available online at https://e-journal.ibama.ac.id/index.php/jpai

Optimizing Mosque Youth as a Third Space in Mitigating Moral Crisis and Juvenile Delinquency

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https://doi.org/10.66931/jpai.v2i02.570

Keywords:
Mosque Youth, Third Space, Juvenile Delinquency, Islamic Religious Education, Sei Tualang Raso.

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ABSTRACT

Young people in suburban coastal regions encounter increased risks related to moral decline and social misconduct due to swift socio-cultural transformations and a lack of positive social settings. This research explores how to enhance mosque youth organizations to serve as a "third place" aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency in Keramat Kubah Village, located in the Sei Tualang Raso District of Tanjungbalai City. Utilizing a qualitative case study method, information was gathered through comprehensive interviews, on-site observations, and documentation that included the mosque's management, youth leaders, community representatives, and local teens. The results indicate that mosque youth organizations effectively operate as a supportive third space that connects family life at home with educational experiences in schools. By implementing organized religious study circles, foundational leadership training, creative activities, and community service, mosque youth initiatives create an all-encompassing social environment that bolsters emotional resilience and moral discipline. Significant contributing factors comprise robust support from Takmir, proactive internal leadership, and community confidence, while administrative challenges and narrow social views serve as major obstacles. It is crucial to re-establish mosque youth as an accessible, evolving third place to ensure ongoing character development.

Article History:
Submitted: 03-10-2026, Revised :03-11-2026, Accepted: 03-12-2026

Please cite this article in APA style as:
Huda, M. Q., Hasni, D. M., & Fahmi, F. (2026). Optimizing mosque youth as a third space in mitigating moral crisis and juvenile delinquency. Dar El-Makrifah: Journal of Islamic Religious Education, 2(2), 278–291. https://e-journal.ibama.ac.id/index.php/jpai

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial period of cognitive, emotional, psychological, and social development that plays a significant role in the human life cycle (Ananda & Amir, 2021). During this phase, individuals strive to identify their identities while facing pressures from various, often conflicting, external values. As explained in Law Number 40 of 2009 concerning Youth, the younger generation and adolescents are crucial assets determining the sustainability of a civilization, and they are expected to attain intellectual, moral, and spiritual maturity (Fuad

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et al., 2024). However, in today's modern social context, the rapid flow of modernization, uncontrolled digitalization, and undirected cultural change have shaken sociocultural values (Ramdani, 2020). The problem of moral decline among young people is increasingly widespread and concerning, evident in the declining level of adherence to religious norms and local traditions (Hardianto, 2021).

Signs of this moral decline are particularly evident in suburban and coastal areas such as Keramat Kubah Village, Sei Tualang Raso District, Tanjungbalai City. The Keramat Kubah area, located near the Silau River and the Tanjungbalai city limits, faces a variety of complex socio-economic challenges, including a rise in deviant behavior among young people. Findings from field observations indicate that juvenile delinquency in this area is increasing, ranging from the habit of gathering late at night without a clear purpose, addiction to online gambling and betting-based games, use of addictive substances and alcohol, to involvement in intergroup conflicts or brawls in the neighborhood (Fuad et al., 2024). This deviant behavior is a clear sign that the personality and moral defense systems of adolescents in the local community are experiencing severe vulnerabilities (Sholeh, 2019).

Conceptually, the main factor causing the growth of moral decline and delinquent behavior among adolescents stems from the lack of healthy, safe, and productive social spaces for their search for identity (Kurniawan, 2018). In the perspective of urban sociology, human life is divided into three main categories, consisting of the first category represented by the household and family environment, the second category represented by formal environments such as schools or workplaces, and the third category which is informal social spaces where people gather, interact, and build emotional relationships voluntarily (Jeffres et al., 2018). When the function of the first category is disrupted due to minimal attention from parents or disharmony within the family, and the second category is too rigid with strict academic pressure, adolescents naturally seek the third category to express energy and gain recognition from peers (Subianto, 2020). Unfortunately, the third category accessed by adolescents today is mostly dominated by destructive public places such as illegal racing arenas, internet cafes without restrictions, or bad social locations that actually accelerate the process of moral decline (Ramdani, 2020).

Amidst the lack of social space faced by the younger generation, mosques and mosque youth organizations present a potentially transformative opportunity to function as an ideal third place (Sintasari, 2021). Historically and normatively, mosques in Islamic tradition are not merely locations for specific religious rituals, but also serve as centers of civilization, education, social activities, and symbols of unity among Muslims (Rifai, 2018; Syamsuryadin, 2020). Mosque youth organizations, as autonomous groups in the development of the younger generation of Muslims, focus on activities related to the mosque, Islamic values, education, youth activities, and skills development (Sintasari, 2021). Through revitalizing their roles and functions, mosque youth in Keramat

Kubah Village have the potential to reposition themselves as a religious third place capable of providing a friendly, inclusive, educational, and reassuring social climate for all levels of youth (Ilham, 2020; Suharto, 2020).

Previous studies on the effectiveness of religious institutions in addressing youth issues have been shared by several researchers. Fuad et al. (2024) in their research in Pemana Village revealed that the presence of mosque youth plays a crucial role in addressing moral decline through regular religious study programs, leadership development, and social activities. On the other hand, Sintasari (2021) emphasized the importance of empowerment and mentoring strategies for mosque youth through da'wah and organizational management training to improve the quality of Islamic education and character development. Furthermore, Khasanah et al. (2019) empirically demonstrated that adolescent involvement in mosque activities in Waekasar Village can shape religious, disciplined, honest, and socially sensitive personalities amidst changing times.

Although previous studies have confirmed the positive impact of mosque youth, much of the literature still considers these organizations merely as technical platforms for implementing conventional mosque-based religious activities (Fuad et al., 2024; Khasanah et al., 2019). There are still conceptual and practical shortcomings regarding how to design and optimize mosque youth as an inclusive, open, and relevant "third place" in addressing moral issues and the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency in coastal suburban areas such as Keramat Kubah Village, Sei Tualang Raso, Tanjungbalai City. Therefore, this study aims to analyze in depth how to optimize mosque youth as a third space, identify factors that support and hinder the organization, and formulate religious pedagogical implications for the formation of good morals in adolescents in the context of Islamic Religious Education.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-naturalistic case study design designed to explore and understand holistically the phenomenon of optimizing mosque youth organizations as a third place in mitigating juvenile delinquency in coastal areas without any variable manipulation by the researcher (Sugiyono, 2018; Yin, 2018). The case study design is applied to investigate contemporary phenomena in detail in a real-life context, where the researcher acts as the main instrument (human instrument) who is directly present in the field to collect data, observe subject interactions, and make in-depth interpretations of the sociological-religious realities found (Moleong, 2019). This research was conducted in the Keramat Kubah Village, Sei Tualang Raso District, Tanjungbalai City, North Sumatra Province, a coastal suburban area along the Silau River that has high social vulnerability to juvenile delinquency and also has three mosque youth organizations that actively develop youth development programs. The series of field research activities, starting from the pre-survey stage, instrument preparation, empirical data collection, to the data verification

process, took place over three months, namely from April to June 2026.

The subjects of this study were the mosque youth organization and youth community in Keramat Kubah Village. The determination of research informants was carried out by combining purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the depth and representativeness of data from competent sources, involving a total of 15 informants consisting of 3 elements of the Mosque Welfare Agency (BKM), 6 mosque youth administrators and mentors, 4 fostered youth who have vulnerable backgrounds or have been involved in juvenile delinquency, and 2 elements of community leaders and local government (Sugiyono, 2018). Empirical data collection was carried out comprehensively by combining three main techniques to obtain rich and real data saturation. In-depth interviews based on free, guided guidelines (semi-structured interviews) were conducted with all 15 informants to explore qualitative narratives regarding the condition of local juvenile delinquency, third space management, leadership and spirituality development strategies, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors of the organization. Participatory observation was conducted periodically on various mosque youth activities, such as Friday night religious study groups, tahsin training, leadership training (LDK), rebana arts training, sports tournaments, and community service activities to capture the social climate and emotional responses of the youth. Furthermore, documentation studies were conducted by analyzing official organizational archives, such as profiles and management structures, membership recapitulation books, work program accountability reports, activity photos, and village demographic data.

Data analysis was conducted in stages and interactively, referring to the qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes four main components that occur simultaneously: data collection, data reduction through coding into main themes, data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives and mapping matrices, and conclusion drawing and verification that were tested continuously until credible findings were achieved. To ensure the degree of trustworthiness and scientific credibility (trustworthiness) of the research results, four standard criteria for testing the validity of qualitative data were applied (Sugiyono, 2018). Technical triangulation was carried out by comparing data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies, while source triangulation was applied by confirming the research themes from different levels of informants. Researchers also conducted member checking by discussing the summary of the draft data findings and interview quotes with key informants to ensure the accuracy of interpretation, and conducted extended observation (prolonged engagement) at the research location in Keramat Kubah Village to build emotional bonds and trust (rapport) so that the data obtained is honest, in-depth, and scientifically accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Socio-Ecological Conditions and the Reality of Deviant Behavior of Adolescents in Keramat Kubah Subdistrict

Keramat Kubah Village, located in Sei Tualang Raso District, Tanjungbalai City, is geographically characterized as a coastal suburban area along the Silau River. This suburban urban setting creates a highly heterogeneous social climate and fragile economic dynamics. Most residents rely on fishing, casual labor, and informal trade for their livelihoods. These socio-economic conditions result in limited parental supervision of their adolescent children's development.

The results of participatory observations and in-depth interviews in the field confirmed that adolescents in Keramat Kubah Village face a very high level of social vulnerability. The limited availability of positive recreational facilities in public spaces encourages adolescents to use main roadsides, riverbanks, and internet cafes as gathering places until late at night. This aimless social interaction triggers various forms of juvenile delinquency, such as the rise of smartphone-based online gambling, the consumption of adulterated alcohol, substance abuse, and even physical conflicts in the form of gang brawls. Local community leaders expressed concern over this escalation of juvenile delinquency:

> *"The condition of the young people in Keramat Kubah is indeed increasingly disturbing at night. Teenagers are used to hanging out until dawn on the side of the road. When they gather in large groups, they start playing slot machines on their phones, drinking alcohol, and even end up taunting each other across the alleys, which can lead to brawls with sharp weapons. It's a shame their parents can no longer control them because they are busy earning a living from morning until night." (Interview with Mr. Herman, Community Leader of Keramat Kubah Neighborhood III, May 12, 2026).*

This moral vulnerability indicates the fragility of the home environment as the first place and the school as the second place in fortifying adolescents' personalities. The need for a social environment that can accept adolescents' individuality without hierarchical pressures is a fundamental reason for the need to establish mosque youth organizations as a nurturing third place.

Mapping the Organization and Capacity of Mosque Youth in Keramat Kubah Subdistrict

Amid the high escalation of juvenile delinquency in Keramat Kubah Village, three main mosque youth organizations are actively transforming into moral bulwarks for the younger generation. These three organizations are Al-Ikhlas Mosque Youth (Remas), Nurul Huda Youth (Remas Nurul Huda), and Taqwa Youth (Remas Taqwa). Each organization has a community base in a different neighborhood and develops social intervention programs tailored to the characteristics of local youth vulnerabilities. Empirical data mapping regarding

membership, flagship programs, and mitigation focus is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mapping of Mosque Youth Organizations and Main Programs in Keramat Kubah Subdistrict

Name of the Mosque Youth Organization	Number of Active Members	Featured Work Program	Forms of Mitigation of Juvenile Delinquency
Al-Ikhlas Remes (Jl. Keramat Kubah)	35 Teenagers	Friday Night Study,*Tahsin* Quran, Readings *Dibai*	Prevent promiscuity, alcohol and addictive substances
Remes Nurul Huda (Environment III Sacred Dome)	28 Teenagers	Basic Leadership Training (LDK), Public Speaking Training, Rebana Art	Prevent online gambling addiction,*game*betting , and apathy
Remes Taqwa (Sacred Dome IV Circle)	30 Teenagers	Joint Futsal & Beach Volleyball, Community Service, Environmental Disaster Response	Prevent gang fights and wild hanging out habits

Table 1 indicates that 93 youth in Keramat Kubah Village were successfully actively integrated into the mosque-based socio-religious environment. This success is inseparable from the commitment of the Mosque Welfare Agency (BKM), which granted broad autonomy to youth administrators in managing mosque facilities. The Head of the BKM Al-Ikhlas Mosque emphasized the importance of the mosque's openness to youth:

> *"We in the BKM ranks realize that this mosque should not only be filled with elderly people for the five daily prayers. If the mosque doors are locked and young people are prohibited from entering for fear of dirt or noise, they will surely run to the streets and fall into gambling or drugs. That's why we have completely handed over the terrace and hall of the mosque to the Remas children for activities. We fully support the electricity, sound system, and sports field facilities." (Interview with H. Syamsul, Chairman of the BKM Al-Ikhlas Keramat Kubah Mosque, May 13, 2026).*

An Empirical Exploration of the Three Pillars of Third Place Optimization

The process of repositioning the mosque youth organization as a third space in Keramat Kubah Subdistrict is actualized through three main pillars of activities that are carried out systematically and inclusively:

1. Pillars of Strengthening Interactive Religious Spirituality: Routine religious studies are no longer presented as rigid doctrinal lectures, but rather packaged as interactive dialogue assemblies and peer counseling. The management invites young preachers who understand the psychology of coastal youth. The study topics openly address contextual

issues such as the dangers of online gambling, the impact of drug abuse, and the importance of maintaining self-respect in social situations. This approach has successfully transformed youth perceptions of religious studies. One youth who was previously frequently involved in street fights described his transformation:

"I used to be reluctant to go to the mosque because I thought it was a place for holy people who liked to judge. But when my friends invited me to join the Remas Al-Ikhlas religious study group, the atmosphere was different. The ustadz was embracing, willing to listen to our complaints about problems on the streets without blaming us. From there, my heart began to calm down. Now I spend my free time participating in tahsin training and Friday nights reading diba'i instead of hanging out aimlessly at roadside intersections." (Interview with Fikri, 18 Years Old, Member of Remas Al-Ikhlas, May 14, 2026).

2. Mental Development and Leadership Training Pillars: To overcome a lack of confidence and train self-control against delinquent impulses, the mosque youth organizes Basic Leadership Training (LDK) and organizational management simulations. This training equips youth with public communication, conflict management, and teamwork skills. Remas Chair Nurul Huda explains the leadership strategies she employs to engage marginalized youth:

   "Our main key at Remas Nurul Huda is to be tolerant of our friends' backgrounds. We give kids who are considered 'naughty' or like to hang out as organizers for Islamic holiday celebrations or equipment coordinators. When they are given this trust, their sense of responsibility and leadership emerge. They feel appreciated and gradually abandon old habits like playing slot machines and drinking alcohol." (Interview with Rian, 21, Head of Remas Nurul Huda, May 15, 2026).

3. Pillars of Social Expression, Sports, and Islamic Arts: Mosque youth facilitate members' psychomotor interests and talents through the formation of a rebana arts group, futsal and beach volleyball tournaments, and community service activities. The organization of inter-neighborhood sports tournaments initiated by Remas Taqwa has proven effective in reducing tensions between alley hostilities that often lead to brawls. The aggressive energy of the youth is channeled positively into sports competitions with an Islamic brotherhood nuance, which is followed by social actions such as cleaning riverbanks and distributing aid to orphans in the Keramat Kubah Village.

Dynamics of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Organization in the Field

The success of the mosque youth in carrying out the function of the third

space in Keramat Kubah Village is determined by the interaction between supporting and inhibiting factors. The main supporting factors consist of: (1) Strong intrinsic commitment and awareness from the core management of the mosque youth; (2) Full support from the BKM in the form of providing access to facilities and infrastructure free of charge; and (3) High levels of trust and appreciative support from community leaders and parents in Keramat Kubah Village.

On the other hand, empirical data analysis identified three main inhibiting factors that still hinder the optimization of the role of organizations in the field: (1) Limited organizational governance and financial administration management capabilities at the youth mosque management level; (2) The lack of a structured cadre and regeneration system for management, which results in stagnation of activities when senior management graduates from school or goes to work; and (3) The existence of a stigma or exclusive perception from some groups of outside youth who still believe that mosques are only intended for youth who are pious and devout, thus creating a psychological barrier for youth who intend to improve themselves.

Discussion

Repositioning Mosque Youth Organizations as a Third Space in the Sociology of Islamic Education

Empirical findings in Keramat Kubah Village, Sei Tualang Raso District, Tanjungbalai City strongly confirm that the social role of mosque youth organizations can be accelerated from merely a vehicle for religious ceremonies to a nurturing and transformative third place. Within the framework of urban sociology, a third place is defined as a neutral social environment outside the domestic realm of the home (first place) and the formal realm of school (second place) that offers psychological comfort, equal status without hierarchical boundaries, and the opportunity to build emotional relationships voluntarily (Jeffres et al., 2018). When the function of the home as a first place experiences communication dysfunction due to economic pressures of coastal families, and school as a second place is limited by a rigid curriculum and academic demands, adolescents instinctively seek a third space to vent psychomotor energy and gain identity recognition from peers (Ananda & Amir, 2021; Subianto, 2020).

If the third space accessed by teenagers is dominated by uncontrolled public spaces such as online slot gambling arenas, free internet cafes, and illegal hangouts on riverbanks, the process of moral degradation and deviant behavior will accelerate massively (Hardianto, 2021; Ramdani, 2020). It is in this context that the repositioning of mosque youth finds its crucial point. By breaking down formal barriers and transforming the mosque's terrace and hall into a youth-friendly public space, the mosque youth organization at Keramat Kubah has succeeded in restoring the mosque's historical function to that of the era of Islamic self-improvement: not merely a site of ritual worship (ubudiyah), but also

as a center of civilization, a center for community development, and a space for strengthening Islamic brotherhood (Rifai, 2018; Syamsuryadin, 2020). This flexible and reassuring approach to development has transformed the mosque from a rigid, intimidating place to a longed-for "second home" for the young generation of Muslims seeking identity (Ilham, 2020; Suharto, 2020).

Conceptual Novelty Formulation: An Integrative Model of Third Space Based on Coastal Sub-Urban Mosques

The main scientific novelty resulting from this research is the formulation of an Integrative Mosque-Based Third Place Model for Suburban Coastal Youth. This conceptual model complements and expands conventional third place theory (Oldenburg, 1999; Jeffres et al., 2018), which tends to be oriented towards secular commercial public spaces, by integrating transcendent values and empowerment based on religious communities. This model transforms the potential of mosques through four core dimensions that are systematically interconnected:

1. Inversive Inclusivity: Dismantling the barriers of exclusive social stigma that have separated "pious teenagers" from "delinquent teenagers." This model implements an inclusive social strategy that proactively approaches and provides leadership roles to teenagers vulnerable to street delinquency, thereby creating an environment of unconditional social acceptance.
2. Bifurcated-Holistic Activity Matrix: Proportional balance between the spiritual dimension (dialogic religious study, tahsin, dhikr) which provides emotional stability of the soul (muthma'innah soul), with the physical and socio-creative dimensions (futsal, beach volleyball, tambourine art, social service) which absorbs the psychomotor energy of adolescents constructively.
3. Participatory Governance and Intergenerational Mentorship: A relationship pattern between the Mosque Welfare Agency (BKM) and mosque youth based on providing managerial autonomy, facilitating facilities without retribution, and providing non-judgmental mentorship, thereby fostering a strong sense of belonging in the youth.
4. Coastal Sub-Urban Social Resilience Mechanism: Formation of an internal moral defense fortress in peer groups (peer-group immunity) that is able to neutralize negative pressures in the coastal environment (online gambling, alcohol, brawls) through the creation of a new collective identity as proud mosque builders.

The synthesis of this model proves that mitigating juvenile delinquency in coastal suburban areas cannot be resolved solely through a rigid doctrinal approach or repressive legal sanctions, but must be pursued through the provision of a more attractive, inclusive, and meaningful counter-social ecosystem within the mosque environment.

Comparative Analysis with Previous Literature

The findings of this study in Keramat Kubah Village have a common thread that strengthens and expands the analytical scope of several previous studies. These results align with the findings of Fuad et al. (2024) in Pemana Village and Khasanah et al. (2019) in Waekasar Village, which concluded that active youth participation in mosque organizations is directly proportional to an increase in religious character and a decrease in moral decline. However, this study provides a corrective contribution to the limitations of previous studies that tended to position mosque youth organizations merely as objects of technical implementation of BKM religious programs (Fuad et al., 2024). This study proves that mosque youth must be positioned as autonomous subjects who hold managerial control over their own social space.

Furthermore, these findings enrich Sintasari's (2021) thinking regarding the importance of empowering mosque youth through leadership training and da'wah management. While Sintasari (2021) focused her discussion on improving the formal quality of Islamic education, this study goes further by demonstrating the sociological-practical implications of such empowerment in reducing physical street conflict (alley brawls) and digital-based gambling among coastal youth. The integration of mental-spiritual development (Marzuki, 2020; Ramayulis, 2018) and the channeling of physical-social talents and interests (Kurniawan, 2018) has proven to be the most powerful instrument in developing self-control and a religious culture that is honestly internalized in everyday life (Fathurrohman, 2015; Sahlan, 2010).

Academic, Pedagogical, and Public Policy Implications

The findings and conceptual framework formulated in this study have very broad multidimensional implications:

1. Theoretical-Academic Implications: This research provides a conceptual contribution to the development of community-based Islamic education theory. Islamic education should no longer be isolated within the boundaries of formal school classrooms, but rather should be integrated with the sociological dynamics of the public sphere, where mosques serve as social laboratories where the values of akhlakul karimah are actually practiced (Aziz et al., 2005; Muqowim, 2019).
2. Pedagogical-Practical Implications: Provides a new direction for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) educators and practitioners in designing youth development methods based on the principles of inclusivity, interactive dialogue, and empowerment of psychomotor potential. The approach to preaching and religious teaching for coastal youth must prioritize inclusive language and avoid judgmental patterns.

3. Public Policy Implications: This serves as a strategic recommendation for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Tanjungbalai City Government, and the Community Empowerment Agency (BKM) in all coastal areas to formulate policies to revitalize youth-friendly mosques. This policy includes allocating a dedicated youth development budget within mosque treasuries, providing mosque-based sports and arts facilities, and conducting regular organizational management training for youth mosque administrators.

Research Limitations and Future Study Directions

The researcher fully realizes that this research has methodological limitations, namely focusing on a qualitative case study within a single coastal suburban area (Kelurahan Keramat Kubah, Tanjungbalai) with specific local characteristics. Therefore, generalizing the findings broadly requires contextual caution. Assuming these limitations, the researcher recommends several strategic directions for future research: (1) Conducting large-scale quantitative research (survey research) to statistically test the correlation between the frequency of attendance at third-place mosques and the decrease in the juvenile delinquency index; (2) Action research to design and test the effectiveness of a digital-based youth mosque leadership training module; and (3) Cross-regional comparative studies comparing the dynamics of youth mosques in coastal areas with metropolitan urban areas.

CONCLUSION

Optimizing the mosque youth organization as a third place has proven to be a highly efficient, responsive, and contextually appropriate pedagogical approach in addressing the moral crisis and delinquent behavior in Keramat Kubah Village, Sei Tualang Raso District, Tanjungbalai City. By integrating the pillars of strengthening religious spirituality, developing mental leadership, and providing a means for social expression and Islamic art, the mosque youth have succeeded in transforming the mosque's surroundings into a safe, inclusive social space that supports the search for self-identity for the younger generation. The presence of this religious third space can take over the energy and free time of teenagers, increase religious obedience, build social empathy, and protect them from the dangers of promiscuity, online gambling, drug abuse, and intergroup conflict.

Supporting elements such as the dedication of the management, guidance from the BKM, active community participation, and mosque facilities are key factors in sustaining the organization's function. However, the organization still faces challenges in internal management, cadre development, and an exclusive stigma that can limit the reach of development programs. Therefore, it is recommended that the BKM and mosque youth advisors in Keramat Kubah Village make systematic improvements in organizational management through structured leadership management training, formulating a more inclusive

recruitment pattern that includes youth from diverse backgrounds, and involving creative programs based on interests and talents that are relevant to current developments to create a generation of young Muslims with good morals and high competitiveness.

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